

The Great Unknown

Martha McCulloch-Williams
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"I can't hear you! I won't, I won't, I won't! Anyway, I wouldn't have you if you were made of diamonds and white sugar!" Nora cried saucily, sticking her fingers in her ears, but not very deep.

Her suitor, Calvin Burrows, Esq., laughed heartily.

"Don't you think you'd accept me if I got myself made over into a Christmas card?" he asked, his eyes twinkling.

Nora turned her back to him.

"Some people are pigs for obstinacy—yes, pigs—and blinder than moles into the bargain. They never can see when their room is better than their company."

"Dear me! How distressing!" Burrows said equably. He had a notion that he had brought Nora up, and so knew everything about her. "I know whom you mean," he ran on. "It's that tiresome little girl in the county all by her lonesome! Not much," Burrows said, reaching toward his pipe pocket.

Nora eyed him with fresh disdain.

"You're a regular chimney," she said. "What is the saying about smoking chimneys?"

"Oh, it goes on to mention scolding wives!" Burrows interrupted. He had by this time filled the pipe and was crowding the tobacco well down in the bowl. When it was poked to suit him he lit it, puffed once or twice, then stood up, faced the door and said: "I shall have the paper with the birds put on the parlor, Nora, and that pink dowered pattern in the hall. I think that's what you said you'd like best?" pausing with his hand on the knob, his lids downcast, but a velvet twinkle behind them.

"You know I said no such thing. If you go and buy those tawdry green birds, I'll never set foot in your new house—not while they're on the walls," Nora burst out. "And pink roses in a hall! My heavens! That's just like a man. It's nothing to me—nothing in the world—but I do hate to see good money wasted, so I'm going with you to town and pick out something decent."

"I'm obliged to you; so will my wife be," Burrows said civilly, turning back to her. He had the look of one pondering a new and strange idea, but came out of his daze quickly and said, with a good humored smile: "Nora, I've thought all along you were in town; that after awhile you'd agree with me; that you might as well take me. But today you've shown me better. I don't deny it hurts to admit it, but then I'm not the sort to whine. So let's make a bargain, right here and now—you help me fix my house up so any other girl will be glad to take me for it, and I'll do my very best to bring Aunt Beena round about Jimmy Dolan. Jimmy is not such a bad sort. The worst that can be said is that there isn't much to him. That won't matter in the least seeing he has money enough to insure rations for two. You—any girl—might do a lot worse than to take him."

"Why, you've said many a time the reason he was no worse was that he hadn't sense enough," Nora broke in. Burrows gave her a quick look, but went on steadily: "Maybe I did; but, then, you must allow something for jealousy. I was jealous of Jimmy, but I am not any more. The case stands just thus: You won't have me, not for anything I can say or do or be, and a wife I'm bound to have. It's dead, lonesome living on a big place in a new home all by yourself. But I have got to get out of living by myself, and you must help me. Women know each other as men never can. Tomorrow morning I'll come over bright and early, and as we drive to town you can tell me who is worth having and where is my best chance."

Nora stared at him hard. In all her life Burrows had never made one-half so long a speech to her. After he went she was quiet for a full hour. She had teased and tyrannized over and flouted him so long, so merrily, it gave her a start to think the occupation was soon to be definitely gone. By way of getting over the shock she ran to her room and spent the interval before supper in trying on her prettiest frocks and counting her hair three ways. She found out by choosing a blue dress, two years old, yet Burrows' special admiration. She also decided to wear her loosely veiled about her face.

She had said it was a sin to go back to a set partner.

When she stepped into his study she was a vision of despair—at least to his unworshipful eye.

He did not tell her so. Indeed, the expression was for the first time in his decidedly unamiable. There was an absolute silence while she looked at a slapping pace over a long stretch. It ended all a sharp. Burrows related in as they came to the door to the house to a low, hoarse voice. "They know

who's behind them most as well as I do," he said to Nora. "Poor lassies! To think they'll soon have to be taking some one else to town!"

"Who?" Nora said crossly. "Of course you know. That was all make believe, your wanting me or wanting me to tell you things. You wouldn't heed a word I'd say. I know men—oh, a whole lot better than they know themselves!"

"No doubt. That's a woman's privilege," Burrows said, smiling. "But I really have not made up my mind. There are six girls, any of whom would do mighty well. Trouble is—will any of the six have me? I doubt it."

"I don't, not the least. Girls are crazy to marry—that is, the most of them," Nora interjected, then suddenly flushing. "But tell me who they are—that is, if I know them. You may be meaning some strange bodies I never heard of."

"There is one you don't know, so I shan't name her," Burrows said, with a crafty smile. "Suppose I name them alphabetically. What would you say to Miss Alice Bane?"

"She shan't have you. She's a cat! I hate her," Nora said suddenly, sitting very upright. Burrows looked properly humbled. "How about Cora Eton?" he asked. Nora almost stamped her foot. "She's pretty enough, but the greatest snob!" To this Burrows answered only with an inaudible chuckle, and for at least two minutes there was no sound but the rattling of hoofs. Then Nora broke out: "I know Elfrida Vance is on your list. Did you ever eat a pie she made? I did—once. It almost killed me. If you take Elfrida I shall think you want to commit suicide."

"By-by, Frida. Nobody can say that about Susie Moran," Burrows said, with another chuckle, this time out loud. Nora shot a glance at him and shrugged her shoulders, saying: "No, but if I wanted a pin cushion I'd buy it rather than marry it. In five years Susie Moran will be a perfect lump—worse than her mother, and she's bad enough, dear knows."

"See here! This is getting serious. You are bent on making me take the girl you don't know," Burrows said.

Nora nodded. "Tell me what she's like," she said. "But, of course, you think she's an angel."

"I do not. She's far from it," Burrows protested. "In fact, that's just what she particularly is not. She's not exactly pretty either. I should call her rather winsome. She'll lead some man a dance—whichever is lucky enough to get her—but the getting is going to be mighty well worth while."

"Is she tall?" Nora asked. "Just your height."

Nora looked thoughtful a minute. "What sort of eyes and hair?" she demanded next. Burrows looked puzzled. "Her hair is—oh, I don't just know. It's brown sometimes and sometimes yellow—and her eyes are all sorts of blue, except the cold light blue that makes you creepy. I can't describe her—nobody can—but she's a toast wherever she goes."

"You'll be jealous," Nora said, looking away and tilting her lips. Again Burrows shook his head.

"She's the sort to be trusted," he said. "I wish you could see her. Then you'd understand."

"You are an unfeeling wretch, pretending so long that you wanted me," Nora cried, "when you've been in love with this creature! Why can't I ever see her? I know she is as bad as any of the rest, but I want to prove it."

"You are right. I have loved her, oh, for ages!" Burrows said. "But you can't see her, nor I'm afraid, ever know her well, because, you see, she is—yourself!"

"Oh," Nora said, looking straight ahead for a minute. When she began to speak again it was all about wall paper. Needless to say, the new Burrows house was finished entirely to her liking.

The Opal Superstition.

The world is full of superstition, and one of the worst is that the opal is 'unlucky.' This superstition arose when the black death swept Europe. At that time the opal was very popular, and some noticed that when a victim of the disease was dying the opal on the finger brightened and when he was dead it became dull. Of course this took the popular fancy, and at once opals became 'unlucky' and have remained so ever since. Very likely they do not change at all on the fingers of a dying person, and the whole matter is like that question which once caused so much discussion in the scientific world—i. e., why is it that when you put a fish in a bowl of water the weight of the bowl of water is not increased? Many learned answers were given, but finally one duffer weighed a bowl of water with and without the fish in it and thus settled the matter.

Dangerous Gold Measure.

A well-to-do elderly gentleman living in one of the suburbs of Philadelphia is known in the neighborhood as something of a miser and has made himself extremely unpopular with local tradesmen by always pleading for 'good measure' and his slowness in settling his bills. Quite recently he was feeling ill and consulted a physician, who wrote him a prescription, which he took to a drug store near his home to have filled. "Be sure and let the lady send measure, won't you, Mr. Blank?" said he, with his customary grumble, and a broad smile came over the face of the druggist as he read the prescription. "For once," he replied, "I would be glad to do it if I dared, as if I put in one grain more than this prescription calls for you would be dead in five minutes!"—Philadelphia Record

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Experience of a Fresh Young Man in His Start in Business.

Here is something that should appeal to every young man starting out in business: "When I came to New York," said a bright fellow to me, "I engaged by the year as entry clerk with a large dry goods house. I soon found out I couldn't get along with the superintendent, a dictatorial, domineering man. Being young and fresh, I 'assaulted' him, which made matters all the worse for me. At last my position became unbearable, and I quietly looked around for another place. The manager of a great grocery house asked where I worked and why I wanted to make a change. I told him in all frankness, and he asked me to come around in a few days. I guess I talked altogether too much. When I called he said, 'I have no place open at present, but I guess I can find a hole for you.' That was enough. I went back to my store and resigned."

"The next morning I presented myself before the manager of the grocery house. 'As I told you,' said he, 'I have no place open at present,' and walked away. 'But,' said I, 'didn't you tell me you would find a hole for me?' 'I did,' he answered back. 'Ain't you in it?' He then added, 'Sir, I am superintendent of the firm you have been working for is my brother.' I have worked since then with my hands in my pockets, and the lesson took a good deal of the freshness out of me. It taught me to look before I leaped."—New York Press.

WEIGHT FLUCTUATIONS.

A Man May Gain and Lose Five Pounds in the Day.

"A dinner like this increases one's weight two and a half pounds," said a physiologist as he finished his more than generous meal. "An average dinner increases the weight two pounds two ounces. Did you ever consider how the weight fluctuates night and day?"

"We lose in bed at night two pounds six ounces. Between breakfast and lunch we lose fourteen ounces. Between lunch and dinner we lose ten ounces more. Total loss, four pounds fourteen ounces. That goes on every day of our lives."

"At breakfast we gain one pound twelve ounces; at lunch, one pound; at dinner, as I said before, two pounds two ounces. Total gain, four pounds fourteen ounces."

"Thus, day by day, gaining nearly five pounds, our weight remains uniform. If we ate but a half or a third what we do, it is logical to suppose that our organs, digestive and so on, would have but half as much work to do and that our bodies in consequence would be able to do twice as much? That is the logical supposition, and no doubt it is the correct one, but man is still too nearly animal to eat only what he needs. He insists upon eating till he can hold no more."

Saved by the Apostles' Creed.

The value of a religious education was once experienced by the skeptic Hume. He fell off a temporary bridge connecting old and new Edinburgh and sank in a bog. After many cries for assistance an old woman drew near and began to make preparations for saving him. But as soon as she saw who it was she would say she desisted and bade him stay where he was. "I am no atheist," protested Hume. "I assure you, good woman, you are mistaken." "Well, then, if you are not an atheist," she cried, "you can say your belief, and if you cannot do that I will be no aid to save an infidel." Hume accordingly, enmeshed in the swamp, doctored—recited the Apostles' Creed and, having made no mistake in the recital, was duly saved by this severe Samaritan. If he had failed—

Exhibits in Law Cases.

What are known as "exhibits" in law cases range from sheets of paper to boilers and other large articles. At various times an omnibus, a motor car and a cab have been on view in the private roadway by the side of the London law courts, and as they could not be brought into the witness box the judge and jury have had to go out and inspect them in the open. One of the most ponderous "exhibits" of this kind was a large ship's boiler furnace, which was conveyed from Swansea for inspection—London Standard.

Cool and Thoughtful.

"Yes," said the warden, "he was the coolest and most thoughtful convict who ever broke jail."

"You don't say!" exclaimed the visitor.

"Yes; he left behind him a note to the governor of the state beginning, 'I hope you will pardon me for the liberty I'm taking.'—Catholic Standard and Times.

The Intention Was Good.

Governess—You're a naughty little girl, Christabel, to kick your cousin like that. Christabel—I didn't kick her. Governess—Oh, hush, dear! I saw you kick her several times. Christabel—I didn't. I missed her every time.—Punch.

Jumping at Conclusions.

"I see that the human otter is no more. Here the chap who swallowed milk, needles and hatpins. And he chattered glass too."

"I saw. He chewed so much glass that he got a pain."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Value Received.

"If costs more to live than it did years ago," said the man who complained.

"Yes," answered the man who enjoys modern conveniences, "but it's worth more."—Exchange

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